

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 NSA-01 AID-05
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P R 182100Z FEB 77
FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9987
INFO AMEMBASSY CARACAS
USSOUTHCOM
AMCONSUL MEDELLIN
AMCONSUL BARRANQUILLA
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TAGS: PINT, PFOR, EINV
SUBJECT: THE WEEK IN COLOMBIA

1. SUMMARY. AN UPSURGE IN TERRORIST ACTIVITY INCLUDED THE KIDNAPPING BY GUERRILLAS OF A U.S. PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEER. FACTIONALISM IN THE LIBERAL AND CONSERVATIVE PARTIES BECAME MORE ACUTE. THE GOC AND FACTIONS OF MAJOR PARTIES AGREED ON AN ELECTORAL REFORM BILL WHICH WILL BE PRESENTED SHORTLY TO A SPECIAL SESSION OF CONGRESS. GOODRICH'S COLOMBIAN SUBSIDIARY IS NEGOTIATING THE SALE OF TWENTY-EIGHT PERCENT OF ITS EQUITY TO PRIVATE COLOMBIAN INTERESTS. END SUMMARY.

2. INCREASE IN TERRORISM. THE KIDNAPPING OF U.S. PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEER RICHARD STARR BY A RURAL GUERRILLA GROUP ON 14 FEBRUARY HIGHLIGHTED A WEEK OF INCREASED TERRORIST ACTIVITY IN COLOMBIA. STARR WAS CAPTURED BY FARC GUERRILLAS DURING AN ATTACK ON AN ISOLATED VILLAGE IN THE DEPARTMENT
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OF META, IN WHICH ONE POLICEMAN WAS KILLED AND ANOTHER WOUNDED. IN SUCRE DEPARTMENT A POLICE PATROL WAS AMBUSHED BY AN UNIDENTIFIED GUERRILLA GROUP ON 15 FEBRUARY AND AGAIN ONE OFFICER WAS KILLED AND ANOTHER SERIOUSLY WOUNDED. ANOTHER SUBVERSIVE GROUP, THE NATIONAL LIBERATION ARMY (ELN), CLAIMED CREDIT FOR THE 13 FEBRUARY ASSASSINATION OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE COLOMBIAN STEEL WORKERS UNION, WHO THEY

CHARGED WITH BETRAYING WORKING CLASS INTERESTS. THE ELN SUFFERED A SERIOUS BLOW THIS WEEK WITH THE ARREST IN BOGOTA OF A TOP LEADER OF THE ORGANIZATION, ALONG WITH TWELVE OTHER ACTIVISTS. THE M-19 TERRORIST GROUP, WHICH HAS THREATENED TO ASSASSINATE LABOR AND GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, WAS ALSO DAMAGED BY THE ARREST OF AN EIGHT-MAN CELL. PERHAPS AS A RESULT OF THESE ARRESTS, NO MAJOR TERRORIST INCIDENTS MARKED THE 15 FEBRUARY ANNIVERSARY OF THE DEATH OF REVOLUTIONARY PRIEST CAMILO TORRES, ALTHOUGH THERE WAS A VIOLENT DEMONSTRATION BY STUDENTS AT THE CAMPUS OF THE NATIONEL UNIVERSITY IN BOGOTA.

3. PARTY DIVISION SHARPEN IN PRE-NOMINATION STRUGGLE
DIVISIONS IN THE LIBERAL PARTY BECAME MORE ACUTE. AUGUSTO ESPINOSA VALDERRAMA, COORDINATOR OF EX-PRESIDENT CARLOS LLERAS' CAMPAIGN ORGANIZATION, TOLD PRESIDENT LOPEZ DURING THE FEBRUARY 16 INTERPARTY MEETING ON ELECTORAL REFORM (SEE BELOW) THAT HE AND HIS ADMINISTRATION WERE VIOLATING THE PRINCIPLE OF GOVERNMENT NEUTRALITY IN THE PARTY'S PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATION PROCESS, IN FAVOR OF THE CANDIDACY OF JULIO CESAR TURBAY. LOPEZ DENIED THE CHARGE AND THE EXCHANGE CAUSED ESPINOSA TO WALK OUT OF THE MEETING. THE INCIDENT PRODUCED A VIRTUAL BREAK IN RELATIONS BETWEEN THE LLERAS LIBERALS AND PRESIDENT LOPEZ. THE ALREADY FRAGMENTED CONSERVATIVE PARTY ALSO SHOWED FURTHER SIGNS OF STRAIN AS EX-PRESIDENT MISAEL PASTRANA REJECTED THE POSSIBILITY OF THE FORMATION OF A SECOND CONSERVATIVE PARTY, SUGGESTED BY HIS PARTY RIVAL, EX-PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE ALVARO GOMEZ. MEANWHILE, CONSERVATIVE FORMER ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT MINISTER HERNANDO GOMEZ OTALORA AND LIBERAL EX-MINISTER OF FINANCE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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HERNANDO AGUDELO VILLA DECLARED THEIR CANDIDACIES FOR THEIR PARTIES' PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATIONS. NEITHER CANDIDACY APPEARS LIKELY TO PROSPER. FORMER CABINET MINISTER VIRGILIO BARCO, CONSIDERED BY SOME A POTENTIALLY STRONG LIBERAL CANDIDATE, WITHDREW HIS NAME FROM CONSIDERATION, AT LEAST TEMPORARILY.

4. ELECTORAL REFORM DRAFT COMPLETED. SOMEWHAT OVERSHADOWED BY THE LIBERAL PARTY FUROR WAS THE FEBRUARY 16 AGREEMENT BY REPRESENTATIVES OF THE MAJOR PARTY GROUPINGS AND THE GOVERNMENT ON THE REFORM OF THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM. THIS EXTENSIVE REVISION OF THE ELECTORAL LAW INCLUDES A GENERAL EASING OF VOTING REQUIREMENTS, SANCTIONS AGAINST VOTE BUYING AND SELLING, AND PROVISIONS FOR GOVERNMENT FINANCING OF PORTIONS OF ELECTIONS COSTS. THE DRAFT LAW WILL BE SUBMITTED TO A SPECIAL SESSION OF CONGRESS PROBABLY IN LATE FEBRUARY OR EARLY MARCH.

5. GOODRICH NEGOTIATING PARTIAL SALE TO COLOMBIANS.
ICOLLANTAS, THE B.F. GOODRICH SUBSIDIARY IN COLOMBIA, IS

NEGOTIATING THE SALE OF TWENTY-EIGHT PERCENT OF ITS EQUITY TO PRIVATE COLOMBIAN INTERESTS. REPORTEDLY, THE COLOMBIAN PURCHASERS WILL FINANCE THEIR TRANSACTION WITH A LOAN FROM THE FIFTY MILLION DOLLAR FUND ESTABLISHED BY THE GOC LAST YEAR TO ASSIST IN THE PURCHASE, BY PRIVATE PARTIES, OF EQUITY IN EXISTING FOREIGN INVESTMENTS. IF THE TRANSACTION GOES THROUGH, IT WILL RAISE TOTAL COLOMBIAN EQUITY IN ICOLLANTAS TO APPROXIMATELY THIRTY PERCENT.
SANCHEZ

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